HD **US judge blocks oil, gas drilling over climate change**

BY By MATTHEW BROWN and MEAD GRUVER

CR Associated Press

WC 870 words

PD 20 March 2019

ET 03:22 PM

SN Associated Press Newswires

SC APRS

LA English

CY (c) 2019. The Associated Press. All Rights Reserved.

LP

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — A judge blocked oil and gas drilling across almost 500 square miles (1,295 sq. kilometers) in Wyoming and said the U.S. government must consider climate change impacts more broadly as it leases huge swaths of public land for energy exploration.

The order marks the latest in a string of court rulings over the past decade — including one last month in Montana — that have faulted the U.S. for inadequate consideration of greenhouse gas emissions when approving oil, gas and coal projects on federal land.

TD

U.S. District Judge Rudolph Contreras in Washington appeared to go a step further than other judges in his order issued late Tuesday.

Previous rulings focused on individual lease sales or permits. But Contreras said that when the U.S. Bureau of Land Management auctions public lands for oil and gas leasing, officials must consider emissions from past, present and foreseeable future oil and gas leases nationwide.

"Given the national, cumulative nature of climate change, considering each individual drilling project in a vacuum deprives the agency and the public of the context necessary to evaluate oil and gas drilling on federal land," Contreras wrote.

The ruling coincides with an aggressive push by President Donald Trump's administration to open more public lands to energy development.

It came in a lawsuit that challenged leases issued in Wyoming, Utah and Colorado in 2015 and 2016, during President Barack Obama's administration.

Only the leases in Wyoming were immediately addressed in Contreras' ruling. It blocks federal officials from issuing drilling permits until they conduct a new environmental review looking more closely at greenhouse gas emissions.

The case was brought by two advocacy groups, WildEarth Guardians and Physicians for Social Responsibility.

WildEarth Guardians climate program director Jeremy Nichols predicted the ruling would have much bigger implications than a halt to drilling in some areas of Wyoming, assuming the government does what Contreras has asked.

 © 2024 Factiva, Inc. All rights reserved.

"This is the Holy Grail ruling we've been after, especially with oil and gas," Nichols said. "It calls into question the legality of oil and gas leasing that's happening everywhere."

Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon criticized the ruling, saying carbon emissions shouldn't be reduced at the expense of workers who provide reliable and affordable energy.

"Bringing our country to its knees is not the way to thwart climate change. We need solutions not grandstanding," said Gordon, a Republican.

Federal officials were reviewing the court ruling to determine its implications and had no further comment, BLM spokeswoman Kristen Lenhardt said.

Emissions from extracting and burning fossil fuels from federal land generates the equivalent of 1.4 billion tons (1.3 billion metric tons) annually of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, according to a November report from the U.S. Geological Survey . That's equivalent to almost one-quarter of total U.S. carbon dioxide emissions.

Companies paid more than $6.5 billion to produce oil, gas and coal from federal lands and waters in 2017, according to the most recent government figures. The money is split between the federal government and states where the extraction occurs.

Kathleen Sgamma with the Western Energy Alliance, which lobbies on behalf of the oil industry, said the BLM already was analyzing emissions appropriately under rules set up during the Obama administration.

Following previous court rulings over climate change, the BLM has gone back and reconsidered the effects of fossil fuels and then re-affirmed its approvals of projects.

That could happen again in this case, with further studies done before drilling is allowed to proceed, said Harry Weiss, an environmental lawyer based in Philadelphia whose clients have included oil and gas companies.

"This decision should not be interpreted as a ban on leasing activities," Weiss said. "The court is not ruling on whether it's thumbs up or thumbs down. The court is simply grading how the administration did analyzing the issues."

___

Gruver reported from Cheyenne, Wyoming.

___

Follow Matthew Brown at https://twitter.com/matthewbrownap

Follow Mead Gruver at https://twitter.com/meadgruver

ART FILE- In this March 5, 2013, file photo, Trinidad Drilling rigs are seen off of Way Highway 59 outside of Douglas, Wyo. A judge has blocked oil and gas drilling on almost 500 square miles in Wyoming and says the government must consider cumulative climate change impacts of leasing public lands across the U.S. for energy development. The order marks the latest in a string of court rulings over the past decade faulting the government's consideration of emissions when issuing energy leases. (Leah Millis/The Casper Star-Tribune via AP, File) | FILE - In this March 29, 2013, file photo, workers tend to a well head during a hydraulic fracturing operation outside Rifle, in western Colorado. A judge has blocked oil and gas drilling on almost 500 square miles in Wyoming and says the government must consider cumulative climate change impacts of leasing public lands across the U.S. for energy development. The order marks the latest in a string of court rulings over the past decade faulting the government's consideration of emissions when issuing energy leases. (AP Photo/Brennan Linsley, File)

CO brldm : U.S. Bureau of Land Management | usagov : United States Federal Government

IN i1300014 : Natural Gas Extraction | i1300003 : Crude Petroleum Extraction | i1 : Energy | i13 : Crude Oil/Natural Gas Upstream Operations | iextra : Natural Gas/Oil Extraction

NS gclimt : Climate Change | gairp : Air Pollution | gpol : Domestic Politics | c12 : Corporate Crime/Legal Action | ccat : Corporate/Industrial News | gcat : Political/General News | genv : Natural Environment | gglobe : Global/World Issues | gpir : Politics/International Relations | gqual : Environmental Pollution | ncat : Content Types | nfact : Factiva Filters | nfcpex : C&E Executive News Filter | nfcpin : C&E Industry News Filter

 © 2024 Factiva, Inc. All rights reserved.

RE usa : United States | uswy : Wyoming | namz : North America | usw : Western U.S.

IPD US

IPC f

PUB The Associated Press

AN Document APRS000020190320ef3k010t1

 © 2024 Factiva, Inc. All rights reserved.